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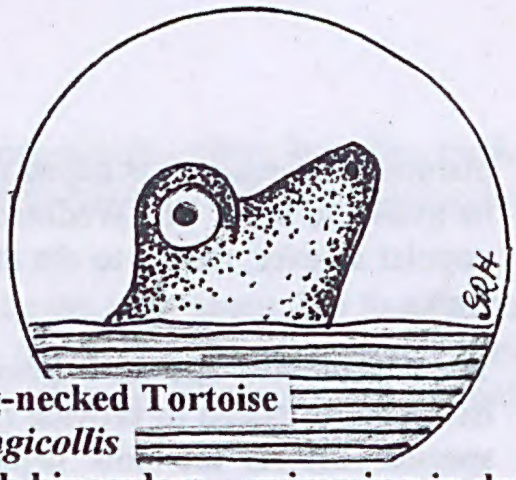

Eastern Long-necked Tortoise
Chelodina longicollis
(Seen through binoculars – swimming in dam)

President's Report for 2004 –11/2/05

Retirement from the Presidency and Committee gives me the opportunity to express my eternal gratitude for the voluntary effort put in by individual members. Examples of this include - leading excursions, sending in and editing newsletter articles, organizing and attending working bees, helping at meetings, writing press releases, preparing planning scheme submissions and participating in conservation projects.

Hence the advantage in having long-term members, familiar with the landscape, and workings of the club over many years. The downside is that people move on, be it for occupational, family or health reasons and are not easily replaced when there is an absence of younger people in the club to participate in fieldwork and thereby gain grounding in natural history from an early age. It was with this in mind that approaches were made to the Principal of the Castlemaine Secondary College to fund an appropriate CFN Award to a student for study excellence in an environmental/ecological subject.

The now closed Roadside Conservation Project, in partnership with the Shire, drew on a community grant from the 'Threatened Species Network' to survey, assess and provide mechanisms to protect threatened native plant species along local roadsides. It was disappointing how few members availed themselves of this hands-on learning experience but the few that did, in particular – Rita, Penny and Richard did a mammoth job on behalf of the rest of us. Hopefully a 'values' identification map for Shire workers and contractors will come out of the exercise. I still believe a conservation project each year is the most valuable role the club can play.

For many years now the club has undertaken rehabilitation of the natural habitat for the Eltham Copper Butterfly colony at the northern, native woodland end of the Botanic Gardens, removing cape broom, brambles, pines and other weeds to allow Bursaria Spinosa and other indigenous plants to prosper. More seedlings are now being grown for planting out when weather conditions are most suitable.

The club is represented on the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park community advisory group established to guide and assist the Park management

planning processes. It is hoped that the proposed draft implementation plans will be available soon. The Wednesday Evening Spring wildflower walks proved as popular as ever, thanks to the attention in advance given by those who lead the walks.

The 'Threatened Species Network' draft Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan has been produced to provide relevant action plans for the conservation of the species. Efforts are now being made to ensure integration of this habitat management plan into Council Planning to avoid adverse impacts.

Sales of the weed identification CD *" Is it a Native*?" have been an outstanding success. Financially the club is in a healthy position with funds well managed by Treasurer Hans.

The winter Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater surveys and the summer Bird Challenge count, ably lead by Ken and Maureen, enable us to keep track of the ups and downs of bird species and their abundance year by year, in some cases with woodland birds less than we would wish. Years of less than average rainfall, loss of woodland habitat, long term climate change, shorter cycles of El Nino, and human created greenhouse effect continue to have an adverse impact upon our native flora and fauna.

Most of us would think it better to live in a world made more beautiful and varied by animals and plants so that 100 years from now, in terms of its natural possessions, it will still be rich and interesting rather than ugly and depleted.

Chris Morris

Sri Lanka: Elephants, Peacocks and the Rest – 11/2/05

Jason Edwards, Wildlife photographer.

Jason began with privileged shots of the famous Tooth Ceremony festivities in Kandy – this is a huge festival attended by thousands of Sri Lankans. It involved decorated elephant processions coming from various points in the city to converge at the Temple of the Tooth. Tensions were high and security at a maximum because of the ongoing political unrest. Jason, as the appointed photographer, had a special pass which allowed him inside the temple and also beyond barriers that kept the general public at bay. This meant we saw shots of the main elephant being prepared and decorated to carry the ancient Buddhist relic and also wonderful scenes during the procession, including a shot of Morris family members seated in the front row on their hotel balcony.

Then Jason, who had only just returned, gave us a mixed selection of his newly processed, but as yet still largely unlabelled, collection. We saw butterflies, dragonflies, leopards, squirrels, anteaters, porcupines, badgers, mongoose and jackals, fish eagles tearing velvet off deer antlers and shots of the only pure

buffalo left in the world. We saw drongos, weaverbirds, rollers, breeding turtles and a huge crocodile carrying a deer carcass on its back in the water to safeguard it from other predators.

We learned that of the 5000 elephants in Sri Lanka only about 200 have tusks. The gene for tusks is recessive and there is a theory that this is because in this country the elephants are grazers not browsers - they do not touch the trees, only the grasses.

The last slides of two very young and distressed orphaned elephants at an elephant orphanage that were temporarily comforted by an adolescent elephant who responded to their cries, left a particularly strong impression with me. This orphanage is raising its elephants with as little human contact as possible in an attempt to make release back into the wild possible for its charges. This is a huge undertaking with animals that may have to be "bottle" fed for 5-7 years and it requires great discipline and enormous quantities of powdered milk!

It was also sobering to realise that some of these slides were taken in areas that have since been devastated by the recent tsunami. Apparently some animals, headed inland prior to the disaster but many others would have been lost. Travel and amazing wildlife photography such as this helps us to realize how precious this planet is and how important it is that we all share responsibility for it.

P.S. Jason was also able to give us an update update on current Hairy- nosed Wombat numbers (you may recall his talk at the Feb 2004 meeting). Individual numbers have decreased from 110 down to 90 but the number of females has increased which is good (because of their breeding potential).

Geraldine Harris

Observations

- A **smart magpie** in the van Gemert's garden has figured out an efficient way to get the berries from the Dianellas – it has worked out how to hold individual stems on the ground with its feet while it picks off the berries! Anne Van Gemert
- An **immature Wood Duck** with the bottom half of one leg missing seems to have adopted the Blakeley Road area, hoping to be fed by the locals. R. Mills
- An **Australian Magpie**, taken injured to a registered wildlife person, had it's leg chopped off and coped very well. Bruce Donaldson
- Three **Crested Pigeons** back in their old spot in Blakeley Road after 3-4 years absence. Rita Mills
- Richard Piesse and Ern Perkins saw a **Gang-gang Cockatoo** at Blackwood.
- **One owl** presently in Botanic Gardens. George Braodway
- A **Banjo Frog** jumped out from below a rose bush while watering the garden. Rita Millls

Hide and Seek in the Treetops 12/2/05.

This little tale starts when our Field Nat. Group was having afternoon tea at the Malmsbury Reservoir on our February monthly excursion. I saw a Brown Goshawk (Accipiter fasciatus) fly at great speed into a small group of Pinus radiata which erupted with a mass exodus of 30-40 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos (Cacatua galerita).

Sometime later, after returning from our stroll along the banks of the reservoir I decided to have a look at the pine tree area where the earlier action had taken place.

I found the goshawk, quite high up in the tree and acting somewhat strangely. It was moving literally along a branch and then back again, appearing quite agitated.

On searching the nearby trees, I found the object of it's concern. In a tree about 20m away at a similar height to the goshawk was a single sulphur-crested cocky. It was also moving laterally but much closer to the trunk of the tree and determined to stop the goshawk getting a straight run at it. After 2-3 minutes of move and counter move the goshawk became aware of me and silently flew off, hopefully giving cocky a chance to find a safe refuge.

Bird list - Excursion to Malmsbury Area –12/2/05

Birds at Warburton's Bridge (20 birds):

Australian Magpie	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Brown Goshawk	Brown Treecreeper
Brown-headed Honeyeater *	Crimson Rosella
Dusky Woodswallow	Eastern Yellow Robin
Golden Whistler*	Grey Shrike-thrush
Kookaburra	Red Wattlebird *
Red-rumped Parrot	Spotted Pardalote
Superb Blue Wren	Tree Martin *
Welcome Swallow	White –plumed Honeyeater
White-naped Honeyeater	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater

* Birds not recorded at the Dawn Breakfast (see below)

Birds at Malmsbury Gardens and Reservoir (19 birds):

Australian Wood Duck	Dusky Moorhen	East Rosella
Feral Pigeon	Galah	Goldfinch
Little Raven	Magpie Lark	Masked Lapwing
Pacific Black Duck	Pied Cormorant	Purple Swamphen
Sparrow	Starling	Straw-necked Ibis
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Willy Wagtail	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo

Ken Dredge

Dawn Breakfast , 6.30am. – Warburton's Bridge – 19/2/05

During the Saturday excursion to Malmsbury in February, members agreed that the open area at Warburton's Bridge, just down the road from Glenluce Springs might be a more suitable birding sight for the Dawn Breakfast. So those members who rose early on the 19th were directed further down the track to Warburton's Bridge and were well rewarded with a good list of birds and a beautiful sunny morning.

We recorded most of the birds seen the week earlier (see list above) with the exception of the Brown-headed Honeyeater, Golden Whistler, Red Wattlebird and Tree Martin. In addition we recorded:

Australian Wood Duck
Galah
Little Raven
Masked Lapwing
Musk Lorikeet
Red-browed Finch
Striated Pardalote
White-throated Treecreeper
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Fuscous Honeyeater
Little Lorikeet
Long-billed Corella
Mistletoe Bird
Purple-crowned Lorikeet
Sacred Kingfisher
White-browed Scrubwren
Willie Wagtail

(total -33 birds -list by Ern Perkins)

Geraldine Harris

Autumn in the Mallee - Club Campout April 20-22. 2005

A trip to the Mallee is proposed, with a three night stay at Robinvale on Wed 20 April to Frid 22 April. This is just before the Anzac Day long weekend.

Find your own accommodation at Robinvale. There are two motels and the caravan park. The caravan park has en-suite cabins and is on the banks of the Murray, close to the bridge to NSW. There is also a caravan park a few kilometres downstream. The town has a good shopping centre with many food outlets. There is also a Club over the river at Euston.

Suggested route to Robinvale is via Inglewood Botanic Gardens, Boort (the lake will probably be dry, but Little Lake Boort should have water), Quambatook, Goschen, Swan Hill, Wood Wood to Robinvale. The bushland patch at Goschen is a noted bird area. We seldom go past Wood Wood without a walk in the Wood Wood reserve.

There are some interesting bushland reserves near Robinvale. The Toll Toll Flora and Fauna Reserve, Bannerton FFR, Moss Tank FFR, Wemen FFR and Annuello Bushland Reserve are interesting bushland areas. Lake Powell is also an interesting place even when dry. Lake Benanee on the Balranald Road is

worth a visit if it has water. Robinvale has a river walk upstream and downstream, through the Red Gum and Black Box forests.

The route home could be along the Murray Valley Highway and Wood Wood, Lake Boga, Lake Charm, the Ibis Rookery.

There probably will not be much in flower in mid-April, but the Mallee is beautiful at all times of the year. If you plan to go, please let me or Rita know.

Ern Perkins

Botanical Notes

Castlemaine Plant List, Edition 11.30.

The plant list is now up to edition 11.31. Since edition 11.0 was published in March 2001 there has been a steady number of species and locality additions.

	11.00	11.30
Number of indigenous species	665	676
Number of non-local natives	4	9
Number of introduced species	342	396
Number of area records	10890	11574
Number of 10' grid records	3645	3984

Thanks to Margaret Panter and Frances Cincotta who have contributed. The greatest number of new records came from the cemetery surveys carried out as part of the Botanical Guardians project. The excursion to Malmsbury added about a dozen records.

The most common plant during the cemetery surveys was the introduced Delicate Hair-grass (*Aira elegantissima).* This was a surprise. The most widely recorded hair grass in the local area has been the Silvery Hair-grass (*A. cupaniana).* In edition 11.31, all of the local records of Silvery Hair-grass have been listed under *Aira* species. One of the projects for the next few years will be to visit as many blocks as possible and check the identity of the hair grasses.

Interesting Plants on the Malmsbury Excursion. The best record was for the Tufted Burr-daisy, (*Calotis scapigera*) growing on the exposed bed of the reservoir. It resembles a *Brachyscome* but the seed head is burr-like. This species differs from other burr daisies in that the leaves are slender and untoothed. The only other record on the plant list is for the far side of Cairn Curran. Austral Rush was also found growing on the exposed bed. It has very small flowers compared to most of the local rushes. At Warburton's Bridge an unusually smelly Goosefoot was found. Often this species is almost odourless.

A profusion of Slender Sun-orchids. This refers, not to the number out in flower, but to the proliferation of names. The Slender Sun-orchid has been split

into about a dozen species, and four or more grow in our area. In the plant list, the Slender Sun-orchid has been listed as *Thelymitra pauciflora s.l.*, meaning that this is the old (lax) definition.

Ern Perkins

Wildflower Photos by Stuart Morris

Over the years Stuart Morris has taken many excellent photos of local wildflowers. Wanting to share them with others, Stewart suggested they be used to create a visual record that both informs and delights. Six colourful sheets of these wildflower photos have been labelled and prepared in CD format by Ern Perkins. Copies can be printed on request (contact Ern Perkins) at a cost of approximately $5 per laminated sheet. At the February meeting everyone agreed that they are a wonderful record of our local flowers and also a valuable reminder of the need to conserve such a local asset.

From the Business Meeting 24/2/05

Welcome to new member: Barbara Johnson

- Ern Perkins renominated as **member of SEANA Committee.**
- Ern Perkins attended a FNCV instruction session on designing websites and has begun **a website for the Club**. He has prepared an instruction/discussion sheet on progress so far and would welcome members' opinions, ideas, articles, photographs and suggested links. Pages on local mammals, frogs, reptiles, butterflies and fungi would be very welcome. Photographs taken on excursions (any volunteers for the March excursion?) and bird and animal photos are particularly sought. Low resolution photos are OK and all photos will be returned after use.
- **Club Trip to Robinvale** proposed for April 20-22. (see article above).
- **Roadside Cleanup** to be held on Saturday April 30th at 8.30 am.
- Copy of **Terrick Terrick Management Plan** available from Ern.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net
Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
March 2005

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.
Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting and leave promptly at the times stated from the old Tourist Information Centre (TIC) opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days. BYO morning and afternoon tea.
Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Fri. Mar. 11. Mt. Alexander Goldfields. Deidre Slattery. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Mar. 12. Macedon Regional Park Foothills. Leader: Richard Piesse, Ph. 5472 3191. Leave from old Tourist Info. Centre, Duke St. at 1.30pm sharp.
Fri. Apr. 8. Mistletoes. Lindy MacRaild, Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Apr. 9. Habitat - Along Forest Creek to Chinaman's Point. Leader: Chris Morris, Ph. 9885 4221. Leave from old Tourist Info. Centre at 1.30pm. sharp.
April 20-22,23,24. Club Visit to Robinvale. (see p.6)
Sat. Apr. 30. Roadside Cleanup. Meet near Tait's Carriages, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 8.30am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear.
Fri. May 13. Habitat. James Radford. Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. May 14. Excursion (to be arranged in collaboration with James Radford).
Sat. and Sun. May 14, 15. Threatened Bird Network Swift Parrot Survey.

2005 Committee - Rita Mills (President) Ph. 54724553; George Broadway (Secretary) Ph. 5472 2513; Hans van Gemert (Treasurer) Ph. 5472 1082; Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Ed.) Ph. 5474 2244; Chris Morris Ph. 9885 4221; Ern Perkins Ph. 5472 3124; Richard Piesse Ph.5472 3191; Athol Dorman and Nigel Harland.

Subscriptions for 2005
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Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24
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